Tape: 057

Transcript of Interview with George Turcott

Conducted by Bob Stewart with an introduction by Bob Goodman

March 18, 1980

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GEORGE TURCOTT INTERVIEW

George Turcott interview conducted March 18, 1980, by Bob Stewart of the Bureau of Land Management, Nevada State Office.

BOB GOODMAN: (Public Affairs Staff, Nevada BLM):

The following interview with George Turcott was filmed after his retirement from the Bureau of Land Management in 1979. He had served the Bureau for four decades, the last years as BLM's Associate Director in Washington D.C. Mr. Turcott is a native Nevadan, born and raised in Elko, and began his long career in that area. While serving as AD, he saw the Bureau through the rough times of change as the environmental movement gained momentum. He speaks with insight of the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, the Wilderness Act, National Environmental Policy Act, and other areas of national concern. Conducting the interview with Mr. Turcott is Bob Stewart, Chief of Public Affairs, Nevada State Office.

STEWART: Just to begin things, how long a career, how long a span did your career cover with the BLM?

TURCOTT: Well, I had 33 years Federal Service when I quit; 3 of that was with the Military about 3 years.

STEWART: Just as we pass that one point, you were in the military in World War II?

TURCOTT: Right.

STEWART: And served some time as a guest of the opposing forces?

TURCOTT: Oh yes, I spent a year as a prisoner of war in Germany. I was a flyer and was shot down over Germany.

STEWART: You began your BLM career after graduation from the University of Montana. And as a field employee or as an administrative worker?

TURCOTT: I started as a professional Range Conservationist in Elko, Nevada, in my hometown. Because at that time, the Taylor Grazing Act required that if you worked in grazing administration you had to be a resident of the State in which you worked. Which was later amended out of the Taylor Act but it does show that even at that time the ranching community liked to have their hometown boys being the regulators. But it was amended out of the Act some years later.

STEWART: Your career, then, covered the beginning of the BLM as an agency and ended somewhat after it had become a formal agency with the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

TURCOTT: Well ... the Bureau was formed in '46 and I didn't come on until 1950, but I worked for the Bureau two summers before I graduated in 1949 and I worked for the Forest Service two summers. I had a lot of friends up there in Elko, which is my home. It had a lot to do with the Grazing Service and then later the Bureau. In fact, as far as this program is concerned, if you don't interview Delbert Fallon, who lives here in Reno, why you should. Because he can give you the Grazing Service background even better than I can.

STEWART: What was the attitude change during that period of time?

TURCOTT: Well, I think that the one way I can express it, when I worked in my early years here in Nevada in Elko, Winnemucca, and in Carson City before I transferred out of the State, that the work I was doing mostly working with ranchers, working with

range improvement programs weed control programs, that. The young fellows, the World War II vets that were coming into the Bureau then, and getting out of college, we used to often say "there must be more than this," the lands were so much more valuable for other than just grazing. Even though we loved our professional work in grazing, and we loved doing the work we did, the other values were really being overlooked. And to them to have a career that went to that point of certain frustration because we couldn't do more and treat some of these other values in more detail, to finally end their career with an Organic Act that recognizes all these values and to see the Bureau moving into these other programs even though there is a lot of travail ... I think that's the joy of my career.

STEWART: The end of World War II was a little bit the beginning of the environmental movement which really blossomed in the '60s then, wasn't it? Is that part of what you're saying, that these young men come from the military ... ?

TURCOTT: Well, I don't know just quite how to answer that, Bob; from an internal standpoint I'll answer it first. I think the fact that the powers that be hired professional people out of the universities after World War II, where before that it wasn't a strong thrust to hire professional people, although there was some, the fact that they brought on academically trained people in multi-resource management people into the Bureau, I think is what led into the environmental movement internally. Now externally, oh I think you know as much about it as I do, the development of what I call the Walt Disney Syndrome on what conservation is, the classic cases in the East, the Storm King controversy, the tremendous controversy in southern California on that ski resort area I can't remember it King Mountain was it?

STEWART: The Disney Program.

TURCOTT: The Disney Program and others, of course, fastened it to the public's mind along with Rachael Carson's book and a few things like that that show the kinds of effects of other kinds

of pollution. But I don't think to this day especially in the Intermountain West, that the populace in Nevada and Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Wyoming those States and Idaho truly understand the conservation movement as far as the public lands are concerned. I don't think they truly understand the level of degradation and some cases the level of poor land condition as far as multi-resources are concerned that the Bureau Administers. I think if they did, we wouldn't be hearing about this Sagebrush Rebellion business. I think that it's a tremendous failure in the part of education systems in these states, it's a tremendous failure in the part of the Bureau, the Forest Service, or whoever, as far as educating or getting across the point of conservation and the need for conservation and multiple-use management rather than exploitive economic development, which is really behind the Sagebrush Rebellion. I think we've got a big job to do. Now that's my philosophy, but we haven't got the point across here in the West.

STEWART: George, a good part of your career was spent in Washington, D.C. setting the stage for that discussion; it was the Kennedy Administration that sent the man to the moon that really gave some impetus to the environmental movement with the spaceship pictures of earth and the comments of our little spaceship earth. But wasn't it also the Kennedy Administration that began the Public Land Law Review Commission?

TURCOTT: Well, they certainly were one of the instigators of it [but] I would hate to give them all the credit. As much as I admire President Kennedy ... the real start of it of course rolls over so many conflicting public land laws involving what we now call the public lands; there may've been somewhere around 24 to 30 of them. I used to say, you used to hear a lot of speeches and all by officials saying there are 7,000 public land laws, well that's right but that includes all the private relief bills. There were about 24 that the Bureau really used, including the Taylor Act and the Soil Conservation Act, and the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, the Desert Land Act, on and on, you get up to about two dozen. They were the ones that were really used, but these Acts, many of them go way back into the 1800s and they conflict. They were all given for special purposes, mostly the development of the West, the western

movement and frankly, the pressures on the congressional delegations from the West.

Because of these conflicts, and the dissatisfaction of being with the some of the disputes their clientele were getting into, was what finally aroused Congress "we got to do something." Along with the fact that in the Midwest and the East a lot of folks may not have not even seen the public lands in the West but they knew they were there and they knew some of these problems and they wanted to have a more codified approach to the management ... so there was an exchange of correspondence between Congressman Wayne Aspinall of the then House Public Lands Committee Interior Lands Committee and then President Jack Kennedy. That is a typical approach used when there has already been a consensus, probably reached privately by telephone or however by meeting that we've got to do something. So, this exchange of correspondence ended up with mutual agreement there ought to be something called a Public Land Law Review Commission to go into depth into all the subject matter area; hire nationally known professionals, good people to make these analyses, to get representation from the States and the user interests on the Commission. And they'd come up with a report that would come up with recommendations as to what should ensue, namely legislation for the management of these lands.

STEWART: The final product of the Public Land Law Review Commission was a volume titled "One Third of Our Nation's Land." [I have] a two-fold question regarding it: one, do you see it as a valuable document if used? And two, do you see it being used?

TURCOTT: Well, I can't deny that it's a valuable document. Yes, it is, it's a tremendously comprehensive document and it has so many different recommendations in it on all the various topical manners that it covers, that you end up, I did any way, almost anybody who reads it ends up in utter frustration because it's so contradictory. You can find anything in it to satisfy your point of view. You can find actual statements in there that grazing is the dominant use and should be the only dominant use of the public land and you can find all kinds of hearts and flower statements about multiple-use and the recreation values and archaeology and all these other interests. So, is it valuable? Yes, it is. Is it of great utility? It's only of

utility in my view, which is a pretty harsh view Bob I'm afraid, but it was only of utility to a government administrator when you wanted to find something that approved or supported some point of view you were taking. The trouble always was, almost invariably you would find an opposing point of view within the document itself.

STEWART: Once the Commission had finished its work, we began to hear mention of a BLM Organic Act. The ultimate product was the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. But there's six of seven years involved in there in the interim period. What was the birth of the Federal Land Policy Act, the so called FLPMA or Organic Act? Did it begin as a BLM Act only, [or] was the scope expanded as it developed?

TURCOTT: Yes, it did. ... The actual submission by the Secretary of the Interior through the Office of Management and Budget, in other words, the President's office to the Congress, was a rather short, brief, but very powerfully written act that gave the Executive broad general powers and authority in all the areas of multiple-use and planning and cooperation with State and local governments ... that basically codified into the law in a brief way the authorities that the Secretary of the Interior thought he had currently. To carry out certain programs that he was beginning to, he and the Bureau were beginning to get into, through just its own regulatory efforts prior to the passage of the Organic Act. Now that's not what the Organic Act is but let me back up just a little bit and go back to the [Public] Land Law Review Commission to give you some background on this, Bob, because I think it's necessary.

There was quite a political strategy that occurred when Wayne Aspinall finally got the Public Land Law Commission legislation passed that set up the Commission over a certain time to carry out certain duties because the strong conservationist members of Congress and his own Committee felt that as long as Wayne, Mr. Aspinall, wanted all this, they should get some of the things they wanted too. And they wanted the BLM to have an interim program which came out in legislation as a tradeoff to get the [Public] Land Law Review Commission Act called the Classification and Multiple Use Act. Now this was basically a multiple-use planning act, and a classification act based on

planning to give broad guidelines as to how the public lands should be managed under multiple-use. Multiple-use was even in the title so there is the real formal start of multiple-use in the Bureau on a formal basis. It was that kind of an approach that the administration's first submission as an Organic Act was built around to just continue doing that kind of thing that the CMU Act had allowed the Bureau to do for that five or six year period. Now, at the same time, another tradeoff to get the Public Land Law Review Commission Act passed was the passage of a third Act called the Public Sale Act of 1964, which had a five-year term also, but it was extended. And it was a little used Act, regrettably. ... Again, through planning and classification, this act provided that the government could sell to communities for agricultural purposes and for commercial purposes, certain tracts of public land at fair market value, subject to planning and public review and exposure.

STEWART: The same provisions in FLPMA now.

TURCOTT: That act was carried over into FLPMA and that Section that you just referred to. And regrettably, maybe it was the Bureau's fault, if it was, it was basically a lack of the program resources to carry it out. I think if we could've done more on that, we'd have heard a lot less about this business of the Bureau's reluctance to dispose of certain tracts of land that should be put into agriculture, or into urban expansion, or into commercial use.

STEWART: Before we get to far into FLPMA, there was another Act that was passed shortly before that; that was the Wild Horse and Burro Act, 1969. You were back in Washington by that time and working with legislation and had a hand in that Act?

TURCOTT: Yes, I did. I was very, very much involved working with then Director Boyd Rasmussen. He pretty much set me up as his liaison person, his representative, working with Wild Horse Annie, Velma Johnston, here in Reno and the other humane groups and horse groups and the stockman and so forth ... to work getting this Act through. And I in no way want to take away

from Velma Johnson all the work she did. She is the real author and progenitor of this Act along with some of the eastern horse groups that now give us a lot of trouble. But I was her contact and I worked with the first Wild Horse Program in Montana before the Act was passed to see what kind of a program could be worked out for wild horses. The Pryor Mountains Wild Horse Range is the result, and of course Velma Johnson was tremendously involved with that and the Advisory Board group that monitored the early program there in Montana. I will say this, the Act as initially passed did not have many of the features that we wanted. We wanted the use of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft early on, and we wanted a very clear and concise statement of Congressional policy on disposal of excess horses. They couldn't be put to any good use or adopted in other way, and we didn't get those things until later.

STEWART: The air authority came with the Public Rangeland Improvement Act in 1978. Did that Act sail through easily or was that also a difficult Act to see through Congress?

TURCOTT: It was very difficult. Prior to passage of that Act as far as wild horses are concerned, I don't know how many oversight hearings I attended and they were some of the toughest assignments I ever had because the Bureau and the Department was taking a tremendous beating over the wild horse program and still is. Again, the first rule of order with a politician is survival and no matter what kind of facts and professional judgment, experienced judgment that you give a politician at times about management of forage resources, whether its wild horses or cows or wildlife or what it is, it just took a tremendous effort and finally a political trade off in this Public Rangeland Improvement Act to get the Wild Horse Act modified.

There is a trade off in there. Some of the things that some of the wild horse groups wanted in terms of improvement of the range ... to get that, they had to accept the use of aircraft and a better definition of excess horses, et cetera, in this act. We can remember telling them about goats on Catalina Island and what happens when you have an uncontrolled explosion, about rabbits in Australia, and on and on, and that's exactly

what happened with the horses. But it took years to get that through.

STEWART: The rangeland improvement portion of that [PRIA] dealing more with livestock grazing also had some problems, did it not?

TURCOTT: Yes, it did. The interesting thing about the Public Rangelands Improvement Act ...

STEWART: It's often called just called PRIA ...

TURCOTT: is that the progenitor of it was actually approved by the Ford Administration, of course an administration that bragged about being frugal and watching the public expenditure in everything, and the amounts of money involved in this act are quite large. They get up to about two billion over time but one thing that I think I take as much pride in as anything I ever did was getting through ... the Department and then getting through the Office of Management and Budget, especially in a conservative administration, the progenitor of this rangeland Act.

When the Carter Administration came in, and by that time we had FLPMA and the Director was to be a Presidential appointee confirmed by the Senate, one of the first things I did when the new Director came in was say "Hey!" Because of my tremendous lifelong drive to get improvement on these rangelands out here, was if the Republican administration did this and we got this thing through, even though it wasn't passed at the last minute before the Carter Administration came in, you can do a little less being a big conservation type administration, to go in there and try to get it revived and do it again. I wasn't listened to too much at first because ...

STEWART: for various reasons ...

TURCOTT: money being the big one, the amounts of money in this thing. And the grazing fee issue still hadn't been settled in FLPMA or anywhere else. ... One day Director Frank Gregg, I don't know what it was, it was something political and of course he's a political appointee, he came to me, and he says "we got to do something, all of the conservative delegations out West are screaming because of the application of FLPMA and some of these law suits involving Environmental Impact Statements, we got to do something about improving the range." Well, I just jerked it out of the desk and said, "here it is." So he took it on upstairs and he this time had to fight it through the Department because of the amounts of the money involved and every time the deciding factor came down to the fact the Ford Administration did it, they were going to put up this kind of money we got to do the same thing. So, it finally waltzed through OMB and over on the Hill, although it's a much more expanded Act than the original one; it goes into wild horses as we discussed, grazing fees ...

STEWART: This is a Jimmy Carter Administration you're talking about.

TURCOTT: Right, but it got through. ... The grazing fees became quite a controversial point during this as I remember; the cattlemen themselves were back in the halls of Congress negotiating how the grazing fee was determined under this Act. Well, I'm not just sure what finally developed the consensus among the leadership of the western range livestock industry that they were going to have to pay a substantial grazing fee, it may have been FLPMA or whatever it was. I think basically it came down to the point that if we are now one of these legitimate uses of this land, one of the best ways we can really legitimize that use is to be able to stand up and look anybody in the eye and say "we're paying a fair value, we're paying our freight," and of course many of us in the controversy over the years have been trying to tell them this. As far as their tenure was concerned, one of the great things they could do was to pay a legitimate fee, a fair fee. Well anyway, this finally gelled; it takes 12 to 20 years, you know, for any new idea. So, this all came up and this Rangeland Improvement Act and it came in FLPMA and all the controversy around it.

Just to show you how fundamental it is, I'll tell you something that very few people know. After the three different Congresses had worked on what finally came out as the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, when a version of it finally passed the House and a version of it finally passed the Senate [were] substantially different. The Senate version was very much like the original administration submission back six years previously. The House [version] was practically the codification into law of detail and regulations and detailed policy statements. That's how much different they were. Anyway, when the Committee staffs and Senators and Congressmen worked days and weeks on end, trying to make a compromise in committee so that they could come out with a bill to go back to both Houses, you know, where you can't modify it at that point. Why it came down late one afternoon to a point on grazing fees was the final hurdle that they couldn't rewrite language and make compromises even though some of them were contradictory, and the final vote was called by the Joint Chairman of the conference. [It] came out a tie, which in committee work is non passage; you have to have at least one vote in the majority before passage.

I had been working up there days on end and on the phone and everything else trying to work out language with these people and the staff and trying to explain the effects of different languages they substituted in Committee, in Conference Committee, and I think the lowest point in my life or my whole working career was late one afternoon when I realized it hadn't passed. Because I didn't think we'd ever get it. But in any event, I waited until early evening and I called up Senator Metcalf, who was the Co-Chairman of the conference for the Senate; he's now deceased, but a great man. I said, "isn't there anything we can do on this grazing fee issue, where you as Co-Chairman could call them back together again to make one more effort?" And he says, "well no, all the procedures are past George, we lost." He was in favor of passage, very much so. I say, "Well how about this, can we work some language in there about maybe some studies and a report back again?" A legitimizing technique of a study and the fact that we'll still look at grazing fees and we'll consider certain things, fair value, consider some of the points of view the stockman are making as to cost of production and so forth.

You have to know Senator Metcalf a little bit, he was a very flamboyant, irascible kind of person. He did not have good

health at this time, and this didn't help it a bit. He was heavily medicated. A lot of people thought he was a drunkard, but he wasn't, it was medication. ... finally, it got down to the point that I said, "just do it for me, make one more try." So, he did. And lo and behold, about 11:30 at night that night, he called them into a night session. They got the vote; they got the one vote they needed and that's why the study on grazing fees and all occurred.

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TURCOTT: Again, we used a legitimizing technique of a study to do it.

STEWART: You said the first time it was in effect one vote short being a tie vote and you also said you had not expected passage. Was that the low point of your life because you'd come so close and missed?

TURCOTT: Right. Well, I put everything I had into getting this Act. As I said, many of us as young men said that sometime before we retire, we want a basic organic legislative directive here, and not all this crossword puzzle kind of stuff we'd had to work with for 30 years.

STEWART: How much was that Bill expanded from the original draft as it developed to the final?

TURCOTT: Oh, tremendously, just tremendously. As I said, being kind about the Organic Act, section after section of it are as detailed as a regulation or almost a Bureau manual procedure, and it's very detailed. This of course was the result of the pulling and tugging that you mentioned, or we both mentioned in the Public Land Law Review Commission, of saying one thing but at the same time "if we say this about one resource or we give this much direction and authority to the Secretary to do something, we got to have a counterbalance over here." It's a very detailed, difficult Act and someday it's going to have to undergo, and it will, considerable clarification. In fact, you

see it now, this Public Rangeland Resources Act [PRIA] is a modification of the Organic Act.

I don't know if its passed yet, but I understand that the Appropriation Act for fiscal year 1981 is going to modify part of the Organic Act for one year on the direct reduction in livestock grazing feature that's in the Organic Act; the Appropriation Act is going to say no you can't put grazing decision in full force in effect prior to full exhaustion of the appeal process, so that's just an example.

STEWART: During the time FLPMA was being discussed, they also, Congress was taking a look at replacing the 1872 Mining Act. Was that a happenstance or was that a designed coincidence?

TURCOTT: No, during the period that I was in the Directorate, in all the different positions I held in the Directorate, irrespective of political party, both administrations had always said something's got to be done about the Minerals Leasing Act and something's got to be done especially about the 1872 Mining Law. I feel that [in] my experience in Washington, in the 18 years that I was there over three hitches, that there are three almost all-powerful lobbying groups in Washington. And I'll discount the National Rifle Association. I don't think they're as strong as any of these three. One is the lobby behind the FBI, one is the lobby behind the Marine Corps, and the other one is the Mining Congress lobby. They are powerful. So when you go to dealing with the 1872 Mining Law or the Mineral Leasing Acts you're dealing with an all powerful lobby and we didn't want to. The strategy on the Organic Act was not to delve too much into the mining laws because as I said both administrations down through the years had said we want to handle them separately. The environmentalists were very determined to get something because they were not successful, nor was any administration, successful in getting any substantial modifications to the Mining Law or the Mineral Leasing Acts over the years.

I had testified many times through both parties, both administrations, on trying to get changes made. But the environmentalists were real determined to try to get something, and the Western delegations and the mining congress were just as

determined to leave the status quo. What finally ended up was, two sections, one providing for the recordation of mining claims and perhaps once we get the record straight the gradual diminution of these 10 million claims that are not valid out on the public lands through a time sequence, by default type of approach, that they will no longer be valid. Although in another place one of the typical contradictions is that there is a statement in there that says nothing in this Act modifies the 1872 Mining Law. ... Of course, the 1920 Mineral Leasing Act, the receipt formula and all was changed. And those were very good changes. It provided much more funds in terms of receipts to the States.

STEWART: The opening lines of FLPMA say that it's the policy of the United States of America to hold the public lands in perpetuity except and goes on to list the exceptions which are fairly broad and general. At the close of it, it repeals the various Homestead Acts. Was that a move that was made with some resistance? Was there a lot of sentimentality behind the Homestead Acts?

TURCOTT: Not so much the Homestead Acts, Bob. There was a lot of nostalgia and sentimentality, yes, about them. Actually, I think most of the Senators and Congressmen were relieved because they were plagued constantly, year in year out, with special items, special legislative items that they'd have to go up and try to support to get waiver of the various laws so that somebody could get a 160 acre homestead tract and they very rarely ever got them. You know we just said there's been X million people that failed to prove up a homestead for the same reason, where the administration is not going to go for it.

STEWART: Now the Congress did, George, leave in three Acts: the Alaska Homestead Act, the Desert Land Entry Act for desert reclamation and also the old Carey Act, which the States administered. What led to that?

TURCOTT: Well, let's take the Alaska homestead situation; that's purely nostalgia, and the strength of the Alaska

delegation in saying, "hey we're still in a primitive developmental state up here. Even though we have the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, let us still, subject to classification (which was a key point) have a disposal act for homesteading." Nobody argued about that too much because we got the classification authority finally in Alaska. Of course, we'd already had it in the Native Claims Settlement Act up there in 1971. So that's that one.

STEWART: The Desert Land Act?

TURCOTT: Now, the Desert Land Act; I don't think it was particularly the fact that the Desert Land Act was an efficient item in this part of the 20th century for a land disposal. The features in FLPMA for land disposal for agricultural purposes to any kind of a professional were much better, but in Idaho there were hundreds into the thousands of Desert Land Act applications. The State of Idaho consistently proclaimed that there was enough water out of the Snake River and from underground sources to furnish a water supply, the State being very much agricultural developmental orientated as an economic policy.

There were hundreds of thousands into the millions of dollars already invested one way or another, much of it through validated court cases that [were] fraudulent. People were ripped off by these consultants and these people doing the filing for the citizens. So that if they could prove up on these desert land entries or get an entry status, they could buy the land from the government, according to this Act, for two dollars or two dollars and fifty cents an acre. I think it's $2.00 an acre. And it was Senator McClure's point of view that a lot of these applications and entries should be allowed. Even though we say we would give priority to all these entry men and applicants under the other provisions for agricultural and disposal under FLPMA, but there they would have to pay full market value, so it came down to that. And Senator McClure was just adamant, and he got other support for his point of view on the Desert Land Act, and it was ruled out. Senator McClure and I almost had a dog and pony show, the many times I'd go up there and testify about the Act and the effect of Desert Land Act and how few of them had ever gone through in later years. I

remember one statistic I had that as a minimum it would take 90,000 dollars under, say 1974 or '75, '76 dollars to just begin to develop one of these Desert Land Act applications.

The Carey Act was somewhat the same thing, in fact ... it was basically Idaho and some Nevada. It was basically the same effort by Senator McClure, although we never had the strong disagreement between the Legislative and the Executive over the Carey Act [as] we did the Desert Land Act. Right at the last minute, Senator McClure, it was one of those last minute deals in conference committee, he just says "oh, we'd better leave it in." Well, who am I to object at that point. I told you before how thin my margin was.

STEWART: The bill then went to the administration and was signed with no problem.

TURCOTT: That's right.

STEWART: There's one anomaly in FLPMA ... and that's the California Desert Conservation Area. Was that an anomaly by accident that was gotten in? What led to that being included, George?

TURCOTT: Well, let’s give the man credit. Former State Director, Russell Penny, in California for years led a developmental program to do something about the California Desert and the tremendous values of that 20 million acre estate in southern California. As you probably know, he enlisted all kinds of support of local communities, local political groups, interest groups, the county commissions down there and the Congressmen. And these Congressmen had made several attempts parallel with the six, seven year development of FLPMA to have a special act passed very similar to the Act that covers the recreation area on the coast, Point Reyes. ... That section in FLPMA and the individual Point Reyes Act do have a lot of similarity. Anyway, it wasn't too successful but Congressman Pettis, before his death, was a prime supporter of this because this was his home area. And something had to be done about this tremendous burgeoning amount of people that were coming out on

the California Desert from the coast under no regulation or supervision or law enforcement or anything else. But they were never able to really get the push behind it to get it passed. So, some of us figured at the time that we were on real thin ice to get FLPMA passed. Well ... by this time the Congressmen was dead, and his wife had replaced him. We really wouldn't object if they wanted to put this in as a special feature because Mrs. Pettis, then Congresswoman Pettis, had very clearly pointed out to us that she had 42 votes in the congressional delegation from the House ...

STEWART: That's the entire California delegation ...

TURCOTT: Right, the entire California delegation locked up, and if we wanted them to vote for FLPMA when it finally hit the House floor that we should play ball with her. We did and it's in there. It provides a real strong law enforcement authority a good one. And it calls for certain plans and studies to be completed by certain times ... there's an authorization act of money in it, I think it's 10 million, I may be wrong on that, but anyway there's substantial authorization of money over time in there and it's good, so there was a Christmas tree ornament as a special favor put on the Bill.

STEWART: And this being 1980, it is now virtually in place; the plan is complete for the California Desert, and it was unveiled a few weeks ago. Which brings us to the point of regulations. October 1976, the Act now is passed. The President has signed it and implementation must begin; it includes a lot of different areas of regulation drafting. The Department set up a schedule and said here's the BLM with the Department and said here's the schedule we'll use in developing the regulations. They've never kept to the schedule. Why not, George? What kind of problems did they discover?

TURCOTT: Well, all kinds of problems. Multiple-use itself is just so complex that trying to write these regulations so that they'll meet the environmental tests that they have to meet, so that the particular resource you're dealing with in any one

regulation ... so you get back to single use again when you do that. For its enhancement and its proper development and the wise use; it's very difficult.

Now there's one thing about regulation writing, I know that it's terribly frustrating to the general public, to any political science observer of government, and that is: why are they so legalistic and why are they written so that you hear words like "notwithstanding" and "provided that" and all that English language technique to provide for exceptions or to emphasize something. Really, I'll have to point a little fault, Bob. For a top level professional to write a regulation and he'll be a non-lawyer ninety nine times out of a hundred, to write it professionally and through this person's long experience and judgement, whatever he or she develops. You get them pretty good, so it makes sense to the practitioner, the professional practitioner, and they probably make sense to the general public, although they may not agree. But anyway, they can't do anything of course, as you know, that violates the basic statute itself.

Then the lawyers get 'em. And if you're short of good lawyers, then you've got a double problem, and frankly, the long delay in these regulations is not particularly through the writing of them or the policies involved, although some of the policies sometimes they may want to wait one month before or after a Presidential election or something. But really, it's the legal side of it. You get a bunch of these lawyers in Interior and the Solicitor's office, if they hear me say that they'd scream at me, but it's the truth. That's where the bottleneck is. Because a lawyer will always look at it every sentence, every comma, where the semicolon is or the period.

"What will that do in a lawsuit?" that's the way they're trained; thank God I guess, but that's the kind of scrutiny they get. And ... that's why you get some of these paragraphs, and as far as English language [is] concerned, that are double whammy gobbledygook! But they're made so that if they are in a lawsuit, you know there is a way out; there's a back door. And really, that's really not the way they should be written. I used to always tell them, I prefer to have a lawsuit as long as they're directive, they're rules. Regulations are rules and they tell the public and they tell the Administrator what both are to do, and sometimes you can't find that.

I wanted to talk about one other major feature as we got going here about FLPMA that's just as telling as the anecdote. I told about how we finally got it passed at midnight through a special meeting of the Conference Committee, but this concerns wilderness. I'm not sure as I sit as an outside observer to this day whether we did right or not. But we gave in on wilderness. The first four years, two sessions of Congress, and all the testimony on the Hill of course, the environmentalists, the Wilderness Society, and the Sierra Club, real strong on having almost a copy of the Wilderness Act of 1966 provision written into FLPMA. Where the administration and all had said, a lot of us were raised out here in the West; we knew the controversy that was going to arise on the public lands with a 1966 Wilderness Act provision written into FLPMA, hell we're not dumb, that's why we were there because we knew the West.

In any event, the third session of Congress when we had again the administration submission, the House's approach and so forth, the Wilderness Society came up there and I listened to it, and I was appalled because I was friends with those people even though we sometimes disagreed on things; they came out against on the Organic Act, and I couldn't believe it, and so did Sierra Club. And they said this: that they were very disappointed in the administration, they were disappointed in all the previous versions of this Act and all the testimony. Everybody trying to beat around the bush about wilderness. So therefore, they said, they were against the Organic Act as such and would propose legislation that would call for basic studies in all the areas of land that were similar to the Forest Service or had high wildlife habitat values. They'd be transferred to the Forest Service and/or the Fish and Wildlife Service for their special type administration and that there would also be a big Wilderness Study and that these lands will be put under wilderness administration by either the Forest Service, or by the Park Service, or the Fish and Wildlife Service. Well of course, you couldn't have hit me harder in the solar plexus, any harder than that, to lose the support of these two big conservation organizations.

The then Director was Curt Berklund, a very conservative man, a man who was just coming out of Idaho as a lumberman miner rancher, wealthy in his own right. Wilderness was anathema to him. We had a provision in the Organic Act that called for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and under that we said if lands have wilderness values, we'll administer them as such

under the 1966 Wilderness Act and it stopped. That's all it said. So, we came back that day and Curt said "Well, Turk, it's done. You're not going to get your Organic Act. Because," he said, "we'll never be able to get the administration to go for wilderness, and I don't believe in it myself." So, Curt and I had one of our rare eyeball to eyeball loosen the tie confrontations. I finally convinced him that he had to lead the charge to have a wilderness provision put in the Organic Act or we weren't going to get it, and that we couldn't get everything we wanted in life and that somehow or another we would live with wilderness. And that I would go up myself and lead the charge on testimony to try to get some special language put in there about BLM type wilderness, that "how much is enough" if the Forest Service up here in the Jarbidge Mountains has wilderness and we have lower foothills, where do you stop? If you go up here in the Owyhee Desert, and these are the examples I used in the testimony, you got one township, you got thirty townships up there that are short scrub desert and its solitude. There's no roads, the way we define roads, there's hardly any livestock grazing, it's too damn dry, and so where do you stop? So, I finally convinced him to go, and Curt did fight it through Interior. But by then we had a Democratic administration, an environmentally oriented, and it was not too hard. And Curt lost a lot of his personal reputation and clout over this. I've got to hand it to him, we had disagreements, but he was the boss. But he lost some over this; he might've ended up a very much higher official if he hadn't have done that. Now today all of our worries about the application of wilderness, because they didn't after my testimony on getting some special features for BLM wilderness, they didn't do it. In fact, they made it tougher than the 1966 Wilderness Act, those that know the differences in the two.

So that's the one thing I think in the Organic Act I worry a little about, but not as much as I used to. I think the Wilderness Society and Sierra Club and some of the others realize that if they push this too hard, they're liable to lose a lot more than they are going to gain. And I do think that the rule of common sense is being used in these Wilderness Studies.

STEWART: Certainly, the number of acres as we reach the final stages of the Wilderness Program are indicating that, and yet a hundred years from now there should be an area much as there was

when Jed Smith first went through the Great Basin. And wilderness, one conjures up forest and trees, and we're not talking of that type of wilderness in the West ...

TURCOTT: One thing, Bob, I would like to say here at the end is I was a career professional conservationist in resource management. I tried my very best to be in tune with contemporary thinking. I've used the word to pronoun "I" here an awful lot here today and it bothers me. I want that qualification here on the record here forever, that I am not an "I" person. It was "we." I was just the leader, that's all.

STEWART: Thank you, George. Coming back to that one last point, "trying to be in tune with the public thinking;" early in your discussion you said those of you who came home from World War II and began working for the Bureau after various educational steps, that you felt there must be more to it than this. Did you find that there's more to it than this? Do you feel that it's been a reward?

TURCOTT: Oh yes! A lot of people ask me, you know, because of my illness that I retired probably earlier than a lot of people expected me to, whether I was happy with my career. I couldn't have had a better career than doing anything than what I did. I just wonder nowadays what the frustration of some of our young people in college and coming out of college about trying to do things better and save the world, whether they'll have the success or see the success that I saw in some of our early goals and wishful thinking and seeing it come to pass. I am very satisfied; I just wish the health would have held up so I could have stayed with them to see the regulations finished. That's the only thing I regret.

STEWART: George Turcott, I want to thank you for being with us today.